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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 003367

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/08/2026
TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM EFIN EU TU
SUBJECT: DISPUTES THREATEN TO UNDERMINE TURKEY-EU MEETINGS

Classified by Polcouns Janice G. Weiner; reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary: The GOT is concerned that French and Cypriot proposals being debated in the EU could undermine the Turkey-EU meetings scheduled for June 12 in Luxembourg. The French proposal could prevent Turkey from closing its first acquis chapter on June 12, while the Cypriot proposal would amend an EU document by adding language regarding a Cyprus settlement that the GOT considers unacceptable. Neither dispute threatens to derail Turkey's candidacy, but failure to resolve these issues would minimize any momentum the GOT might gain from the meetings, and could add to market jitters about Turkey's EU anchor. End Summary.

Two Disputed Proposals

¶2. (U) GOT contacts described to us the disputes over two separate elements of Turkey's EU accession process:

-- Science and Research Chapter: The GOT had hoped to open and close the Science and Research chapter of the EU acquis on June 12. However, France is proposing to postpone the closing of the chapter pending a discussion over whether to establish benchmarks that Turkey must meet in order to be deemed in full compliance with the EU acquis.

-- Association Council: EU member states have yet to reach agreement on a statement for the Turkey-EU Association Council meeting, as debate continues over amendments proposed by Cyprus. The current draft includes the sentence, "The EU calls on Turkey to continue to support efforts for a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem within the UN framework and in line with the principles on which the Union is founded." The Cypriots want to remove the word "continue" and include the EU acquis as a basis for a settlement. The UK is resisting these amendments, which GOT contacts say are unacceptable for Turkey. If member states cannot agree on a text, the Association Council meeting will reportedly be canceled.

GOT Seeking Momentum

¶3. (C) Science and Research is one of the "easiest" acquis chapters, involving minimal requirements. It is slated to be the first chapter opened in Turkey's EU accession process. Kaya Turkmen, MFA DDG for EU Affairs, and Ahmet Aydin Dogan, political director at the Secretariat General for EU Affairs, told us that closing the chapter on June 12 would create a much-needed sense of momentum for Turkey. They say the French proposal reflects French domestic politics, and is aimed at slowing Turkey's momentum. "They want to be able to show their people that they are going to block Turkey every step of the way, even on the simple chapters," Turkmen said.

French Diplomat: GOT "Overreacting"

¶4. (C) Brice Roquefeuil, counselor at the French Embassy, averred to us that the GOT is overreacting to the proposal, creating a crisis where there doesn't have to be one. Science and Research is only one of 33 acquis chapters, and a minor one at that. The EU intends to open the chapter June 12; what difference does it make whether the chapter is closed the same day or six months later?

¶5. (C) Roquefeuil noted that the concept of benchmarks for acquis chapters is new -- it applies to Croatia as well as Turkey, but did not apply to past candidates. The EU, learning from its enlargement experiences, has determined that benchmarks are a tool that can be useful in certain situations. It is only natural for EU members to discuss whether benchmarks should be applied to the Science and

Research chapter. In particular, he said, the EU may need to set a benchmark requiring greater independence for the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey, which, in its current form, appears to violate acquis standards for agencies that oversee the research sector.

¶6. (C) At the same time, Roquefeuil continued, France will be flexible in considering any possible compromise that would allow the EU to open and close the chapter on June 12. The French Government understands that completing the chapter would boost Turkish morale, and wants to support FM Gul, whom he described as "the only Turkish leader who is sincere in supporting EU reforms." But the Turks have to understand that accession is a long process, and they cannot accuse member states of sabotage every time they face a delay, he said. Roquefeuil acknowledged that French public opinion is a factor influencing the French Government's approach to Turkey's candidacy. He said the GOT needs to accept that Turkey is the most controversial EU candidate, and seek ways to improve its image in Europe.

¶7. (U) The GOT strongly objects to the Cypriot proposal to cite the EU acquis as a basis for a Cyprus settlement. GOT officials view this as another Cypriot attempt to transfer the Cyprus issue from the UN to the EU, a move they have long resisted. They also resent efforts by the Cypriots to delete any indirect reference to the GOT's past support for the Annan Plan.

Gul May Sit Out Meetings

¶8. (C) EU contacts say member states will continue to discuss the disputes, and compromises could be reached as late as June 12, just before the joint meetings. However, Turkmen and Dogan say it is likely that FM Gul will not travel to Luxembourg if it is still not clear by COB June 9 whether the Association Council meeting will take place. They say Gul might also stay home if there is no guarantee that the

Science and Research chapter will be closed. In that case, another official would represent Turkey in Luxembourg.

¶9. (C) Turkmen and Dogan acknowledge that neither of the disputes is a showstopper, but say they are upset by what they view as constant obstructionism by some EU states. "I'm frustrated, annoyed, irritated, pissed off -- all of that," Turkmen said. "And I am someone who believes we must keep the (EU) process on track. If they turn their backs to us, what is our alternative?"

Comment: Not a Showstopper, But a Nuisance

¶10. (C) There is still a good possibility that the EU will reach a compromise on these issues, though the pattern of Turkey's candidacy to date indicates that any resolution would likely come at the last minute. The consequences are small if no agreement is reached, as neither dispute threatens to derail Turkey's accession process. Still, the fact that Turkey's candidacy is facing this much trouble this early, and with respect to such a supposedly simple acquis chapter, indicates the fragile state of Turkey-EU relations. Moreover, news of more problems with the accession process could exacerbate the recent slide in Turkish financial markets.

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